It is marriage season and excitement is in the air, mothers are buying the finest clothes to make their daughters the most elaborate wedding dresses and entire families are preparing for huge feasts that they are hardly able to afford. Meena, a 15-year old school girl, is with her school friends. She is scared about the thought of leaving her family and becoming the wife of a much older man.

Meanwhile, Meena’s teacher is finishing her school day; she walks through the village on her way home and all the villagers stop to greet her. One father thanks the teacher for all the guidance and help she has given to his daughter in previous years who has recently been awarded a scholarship to a prestigious university.

Meena’s mother draws the teacher aside and quietly explains that she is considering pulling her daughter, Meena, out of school to get married and wants to know her opinion. The father who has just thanked the teacher overhears and expresses to the rest of the villagers that they should help discourage Meena’s family from having their daughter married.

The teacher agrees with the Father and began to relate the story of her own experience with early marriage. She recounted that when she was 14 she went with her parents to a festive community event. Her parents called for everyone’s attention to tell the crowd of the big news of their daughter’s engagement and that she would be leaving school in order to get married. In response to this announcement voices erupted from all four corners both for and against this decision.

Meena’s teacher explains how grateful she was to have members of the community who cared about her and her future as well as her rights as a child. She explained the huge value she had a few years after becoming a teacher - when her parents lost their store due to floods, she was able to support them until they were able to rebuild their store from her teacher’s salary. She said that her education and the fact that she was not a teenager when she had her children made her a better mother, wife and dqughter. She explained that the extra income also helps her family and she is able to save money from her salary for her children’s education.

At this point, another woman stood up and emotionally denounced people in the community who continued to practice child marriage. She described her own experience with very early marriage and the significant negative impact it had on her life. She explained that she had her first baby when she was 16 years old. She explained that she lost the baby and this had severe negative health issues that she has endured her entire life due to early pregnancy. She also shares about other women she has known who have died in childbirth.

Another man spoke up in agreement, sharing his point that girls who get married are much more likely to be abused and that his daughter had come back to him after being almost beaten to death by her husband.

A policeman in the midst of the gathering crowd raised another point that child marriage had been illegal for more than 50 years and that arranging a child marriage could mean six months to three years in prison. Two men in the crowd said they were not even aware of that law and that if it did exist than it was not even making a difference as child marriage remained a common practice every day in their own families, communities and villages. To this, the teacher responded assertively that this is exactly why there was a need for all leaders – school, faith, community leaders to raise awareness of the law and to demand greater enforcement of it and to mobilize communities to put pressure on families that were trying to marry off underage girls.

Another woman expressed in an agitated tone that while she was trying to protect her niece from being married she felt so helpless. Her niece was very developed physically and looked far older than her age. The challenge was that her niece was one of many girls that have no birth certificate so she was unable to bring the issue to the legal authorities as she had no supporting proof of her being underage.

One faith leader in the community raised his voice, “doesn’t our religion require us to have our girls married early?”. He quoted a text from the scripture, completely misintepreting it. Another faith leader with as strong as an opinion disagreed and clarifies the difference between cultural practices and faith teachings on child marriage.

The teacher held her head, confused by all the competing arguments. She acknowledged the complexity of the issue and expressed her appreciation for everyone’s thoughts. She shared that the following day she would be attending the Faith and Positive Change for Children meeting for faith actors and partners that will be centered on how best to address the issue of child marriage. She invited all of the villagers to join her, confident that the meeting would help to provide importnat ideas for how to tackle the complex issue of child marriage in their community.